

VZCZCXRO7114  
RR RUEHAST RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHLA RUEHLN RUEHMRE RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR  
RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHAH #0565/01 1571252  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 061252Z JUN 07  
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8837  
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUCNOSC/OSCE POST COLLECTIVE  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0344  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0366  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 2054  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0803  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0851  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000565

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN (PERRY)  
INFO SCA/PPD (VAN DE VATE/KAMP), IIP/G/NEA-SA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [TX](#) [US](#)

SUBJECT: ARI ROLAND QUARTET PLAYS FOR TURKMENISTAN'S PUBLIC AND IN  
SPITE OF GOVERNMENT OBSTRUCTION

REFERENCE: ASHGABAT 466

SUMMARY

-----

1. (U) Following close on the heels of its previous performing arts group Yellow Bird [reftel], post hosted the Ari Roland Jazz Quartet April 18-23 in a program that reminded post of the limits of host government acceptance of non-Turkmen forms of expression. In contrast to its almost overly warm reception of Yellow Bird, the host government initially refused to accept the Ari Roland program requested via diplomatic note by post, with the excuse that the proposed seminars in local schools would be pointless since there are no formal jazz studies in Turkmenistan. Charge intervened to dispute this circular reasoning, winning approval for the program. Despite sustained local government obstruction, local audiences turned out in spades for the three public performances of a musical genre one Ministry of Culture contact told post "Turkmen do not understand" and therefore are not interested in. End Summary.

Capital Performance

-----

2. (U) Having convinced the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that this jazz program was a good gamble, post scrambled to advertise in time for the opening night performance on March 19, but need not have worried because Ashgabat's Magtymguly Theater was packed. Older patrons of jazz reflected that they had not heard such music live for years - for some, since the Soviet era. But the tide quickly turned the next day in Turkmenbashi, where the local authorities successfully filibustered a workshop to students of the local music school but failed to prevent the public from interacting freely with the musicians.

Turkmenbashi Tests the Patience of the Mellowest of Musicians

-----

3. (U) Arriving hours early at the Ruhayet Palace of the Turkmenistan Oil and Gas Complex, in order to double-check that local authorities were aware of the workshop and concert, embassy staff were met at the entrance by a triumphant theater administrative official, who declared with a smirk, "it is forbidden (to enter)." The day's first series of calls to the Ministry of Culture in Ashgabat and the local governor's office for explanations yielded a promise that all would be resolved...eventually. Still

forbidden to enter the theater three hours later, the quartet interacted with a crowd of early-comers including music teachers and their students, some of whom had brought their dutars and gyjaks (two and three-stringed wooden instruments). One bakshi (folk singer), a teacher at the school, performed a solo for the assembled crowd. Eventually, the quartet set up their instruments on the front steps of the theater and played for the several dozen elementary-age music students, their teachers and local jazz enthusiasts, at one point jamming with a talented 10-year old gyjak player. At another point the young students pounced as a group, pens and paper in hand, on the musicians to get autographs.

14. (U) During the one-and-a-half hour wait for permission, CAO and CAA wandered back and forth from outside the theater, where the crowd slowly grew, to inside, where the theater administrators stubbornly insisted against admitting the musicians. The host government officials used a range of excuses to try to get the embassy group to leave the premises, including inventing the story that the local newspapers had advertised a different location for the event that morning, that the (lavish, new) theater could not physically accommodate either the workshop or the evening concert, and by insisting that they had no power whatsoever to resolve the situation. Finally the deputy hakim of the city arrived, all smiles, to insist that the embassy had failed to procure adequate approvals to use the theater. PAO phoned the Charge, who was in a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs on another topic, to inform her of these troubles; and within fifteen minutes the deputy hakim permitted the group entry to the theater, his smile replaced with a grim fatigue, and then quickly departed.

15. (U) The formal evening performance drew between 500-700 spectators, filling the center of the 5,000-seat Ruhayet Palace. At one point several young students jumped on the stage for autographs. One middle-aged ethnic Russian man sat beaming in the front row of

ASHGABAT 00000565 002 OF 003

the theater with his son. He later told the CAO that, though he was an avid jazz fan, he had not had the chance to see a live jazz performance since the 1970s.

#### LOCALS' EMBARRASSMENT IN ASHGABAT

-----

16. (U) Back in Ashgabat the following day, a planned workshop at the National Conservatory was nearly canceled because conservatory staff had not received permission from the Ministry of Culture to host the group. As the quartet waited outside, a conservatory employee said she was embarrassed at such inhospitality. (Comment: Government employees regularly refuse to discuss a pending program with embassy staff because of fear that they will be punished for facilitating an unapproved program. End Comment.) Moreover, the Ministry of Culture had rounded up a large number of the institute's students not long before and sent them to attend a seminar of the International Ruhnama Conference that was underway at educational institutions throughout Ashgabat. Representatives of state television channel TV 4 waited with the group, took interviews with the members, and sought information on opportunities for further coverage of Ari Roland's program in Ashgabat.

17. (U) After over an hour of waiting, the blockade broke and the musicians entered an auditorium that filled up with about 100 students, teachers and administrators. The institute director heartily welcomed the group and opened the seminar. Two students played with the group on stage and others showed off their skills on local instruments after the seminar. Despite the initial strain of the event, and evident nervousness of conservatory staff, a small group of interested conservatory students kept the group tied up with questions, individual musical demonstrations and group photographs well beyond the end time for the seminar. Interested students who asked for more information on jazz learned about the Information Resource Center from CAO.

#### CONNECTING AT THE PUB

-----

18. (U) That evening the quartet played freely with local jazz-rock

musicians at the British Pub, a popular hangout and restaurant in the center of Ashgabat. The musicians -- as they had done throughout their stay -- struck up conversations with individuals and groups at the club. Saxophonist Chris Byars held a long discussion with two ham radio enthusiasts about the challenges to free communication posed by an intractable Ministry of Communication. Encouraged by their conversation, they talked through possible solutions to communication with the outside world, including radio over Internet. Byars showed the two how to create a blog online, and shared his current blog on the program in Turkmenistan, at <http://web.mac.com/chrisbyars/iWeb/Site/Blog/Blog.html>.

#### DASHOGUZ JIVES WITH NO DIFFICULTY

-----

¶9. (U) On April 21, the quartet and PD FSN traveled to Dashoguz, where they spoke with local students at the American Corner, held a workshop at the local music school and held a public performance. At the Dashoguz City N. Andalyp Music Drama Theater, the quartet gave a jazz workshop for 200 students and teachers from Dashoguz's music school (students 12-15 years old) and music vocational college (students 15-18 years old). Many of those present, including teachers, said this event was their first encounter with American musicians and their first live experience of American music. The director of the regional cultural center, who opened the workshop, revealed that the school is home to a jazz group of very young students, despite the lack of formal instruction in this art form.

¶10. (U) The two-hour workshop gradually turned into a public performance, as Dashoguz residents joined the music school students, filling the theater beyond its 500-person capacity. Local musicians at times joined the quartet on-stage, and at others took the stage for solos. One well-received piece, Dizzie Gillespie's "A Night in Tunisia," included a local music teacher and a graduate of the National Conservatory, who used to play in a Turkmenistan jazz band before he returned to Dashoguz to teach. A 12 or 13 year-old bass player and a 14 year-old saxophone player also had a chance to perform with the group.

ASHGABAT 00000565 003 OF 003

#### COMMENT

-----

¶11. (SBU) The members of the Ari Roland Quartet were well briefed on Turkmenistan, represented themselves and the United States very well, and exercised good judgment in dealing with local obstacles and sensitivities. Their program had a powerful impact on local audiences, adding to our efforts to build mutual understanding with a local population that is particularly isolated from the rest of the world. The quartet's personal interactions with local musicians, students, and audiences also sparked interest in learning more about what the rest of the world has to offer. That is an important line of thought for ordinary people of Turkmenistan in a period of possible transition.

¶12. (SBU) Post experienced similar bureaucratic obstacles with the host government during Jazz Ambassadors programs in previous years. As the Ari Roland Quartet program demonstrated, official attitudes are far from accurate reflections of the public -- and the public continues to reach out for more such contact. End Comment.

BRUSH